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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3338
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6743
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4475
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3094
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7623
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1693
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5030
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1237
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7362

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Syria/Iran, Syria/Palestinian Authority, Syria/Iraq,
Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Independence Day, Syria/Israel
(4/17-18)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Apr. 18 reported the Apr. 17 visit to Damascus of Iranian FM Manuchehr Mottaki, during which he held talks with Foreign Minister Mouallem and senior Foreign Ministry officials on bilateral relations and regional issues.

Papers also reported VP Shara's meeting on Apr. 16 with former Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei, during which Shara confirmed Syria's readiness to support Palestinian national unity, and called for adoption of practical measures consistent with the Riyadh Summit resolutions to lift the siege on Palestinians. During the meeting, VP Shara was briefed on efforts to rebuild and reactivate the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Qurei expressed appreciation for Syria's support for the Palestinian people and their just cause. Qurei also met with FM Mouallem on Apr. 16; talks focused on the latest developments in the Palestinian arena after the formation of a national unity government.

Papers featured Deputy FM Faisal al-Miqdad's speech in Geneva on Apr. 17 at the International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighboring Countries. Miqdad stressed Syria's support for the full spectrum of Iraqi people and condemned targeting of Iraqi civilians and their national institutions.

Government-owned Al-Thawra on Apr. 17 cited a press conference held in Damascus by Minister of Information Muhsen Bilal on the forthcoming "International Conference on Arab-Islamic Media to Support Palestinians" scheduled for Damascus on April 30. Minister Bilal renewed Syria's condemnation of terrorist acts which target Iraqi civilians, stressing that Syria stands by Iraq's unity and territorial integrity, Iraqi reconciliation and withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq. He added, "the Conference will tackle a number of inquiries on Arab media discourse, the concept of resistance in the Arab media and the role of media in distinguishing between terrorism and the right of resisting occupation." Minister Bilal asserted that if Israel continues to defy international resolutions then resistance will be the only option to regain rights.

On the anniversary of Syria's independence, commentators stressed the values and significance of independence, maintaining that Syria

continues to reject occupation and resist aggression.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"The UN praises Syria's efforts to accommodate Iraqi refugees. Miqdad: The world community is called upon to help Iraqis" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/18)

"UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon: Syria hosts Iraqi refugees and provides them with all means for a respectable life" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/18)

"Iranian FM Mottaki after his meeting with FM Mouallem: We support what the Iraq neighboring countries have agreed upon at the latest conference in Baghdad" (Government-owned Al-Thawra,

"Iranian FM pays a quick visit to Damascus and meets with Mouallem. Mottaki: Iran's participation in Iraq's neighboring countries conference is under review" (Independent al-Watan, 4/18)

"Shara and Qurai reiterate the importance of an Arab move to lift siege on Palestinians" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/18)

"Under the patronage of President Asad, an International Conference on Arab-Islamic Media will be held in Damascus with the participation of 350 media representatives. Syrian Information Minister Bilal: We want to be masters of our land" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/17)

"During Bush's era: A massacre at Virginia university killing 32 students" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/17)

"Lahoud calls on the UN not to interfere in Lebanon's domestic affairs" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/17)

"The Palestinian government calls on Abbas to stop meetings with Olmert. Hanieh: Prisoner swap includes all prisoners, including Marwan al-Bargouti" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/17)

"Russia, China, and Switzerland establish full diplomatic relations with the Palestinian government" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/17)

"Al-Sadr bloc officially withdraws from the Iraqi government. Two US soldiers killed during an assault against al-Ramadi" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/17)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Poisonous Israeli Balloons"

Dr. Imad Shueibi, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (4/17): "Under local, regional, and international media cover, Israel released a new balloon called Ibrahim Sulayman. The external surface of this balloon carries some oxygen so that Israel's agents in the Intensive Care Unit can breathe poison and use it, through their media agendas and fifth column convoys, to cast doubts on the positions of the country of steadfastness and national, pan-Arab, and ethical principles, the principles which the wise national leadership, which is in accord with its people, waged a long struggle to uphold, rejecting all dictates, pressures, temptations, and threats from parties near and far.

"What Sulayman said came from his own imagination and illusionary visions or megalomania. Or perhaps he was used and deceived by the engineers of the Zionist-American media policy. But their plans and strategies once again collapse on the walls of national and pan-Arab principles.

"Syria is the country of resistance, steadfastness, and confrontation against aggression and injustice. Through its support for the resistance, it scored all these victories and defeated the

Israeli aggression on south Lebanon.

"Syria is the country that embraces the Palestinian resistance, which dealt blows to the Zionist occupation army and forced it to withdraw from Gaza. It is the country that firmly rejected the American occupation of Iraq and exposed its political dimensions and colonialist objectives, namely, looting Iraq's wealth, smashing Iraq's military capabilities and infrastructure, and sowing sectarian and social strife to divide Iraq into mini-states that serve the interests of Zionism. Syria is the country that restored security to fraternal Lebanon and protected it from the devastating civil war. And Syria is the country that removed despair from the heart of the Arab and Islamic nation.

"Syria is the country that accepted a just and comprehensive peace, not capitulation, so as to achieve prosperity and implement developmental, cultural, industrial, and tourism programs for the wellbeing of this great people, who made great sacrifices and showed wonderful steadfastness."

"Damascus Peace"

Muhammad Khair al-Jammali, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/17): "Whenever the world comes close to realizing that Israel is the party that rejects peace, evades its requirements, and obstructs every constructive effort to revive the peace process, the Israeli government comes out to the world with

talk about secret negotiations between Israel and Syria to achieve peace....

"Israel's talk about covert talks with Syria or talks through unofficial channels is mere lying.... Israel's rejection of the Arab peace plan and of Syria's call for resuming peace negotiations revealed to the whole world that Israel does not want peace based on international resolutions, peace that can be achieved through public talks with international participation....

"Syria has rejected and always rejects any secret negotiations because its policy toward peace is based on a clear position and rejection of deals and bargains over rights. Damascus' declared and firm peace is the peace that guarantees the return of rights in full and ends the Israeli occupation, with all its military and settlement symbols, in the Golan, the Palestinian territories, and south Lebanon. Israel knows quite well the road that leads to this peace: It begins and ends with serious, frank and public talks that take place not with individuals but officially with Syria, when Israel proves that it is seriously and openly ready to accept such peace free of the policies of maneuver, evasion, lies, and hypocrisy...."

"The Route to Peace Is Public and Clear"

Ahmad Sawwan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (4/17): "Syria "does not need anyone to talk in its name or on its behalf....

"Syria not only rejects secret talks, it also refuses to beg for peace. It has nothing to hide as it publicly and clearly insists on the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the light, and never in the dark or under the table, as Israel wants and repeatedly tries, with a view to distorting and casting doubts on the Syrian position through announcements about secret or unofficial talks or meetings...."

"Memory of a Homeland"

Ali Qasim, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/17): "Independence Day celebrations take on additional dimensions at this stage, in light of the looming dangers and the pressure Syria is coming under....

"It is impossible for Syria to accept anything less than full independence. This is what made Syria a key regional player able to influence events....

"On Evacuation Day, the scene appears once again in all its glory and depth, sowing another seed toward the achievement of the larger evacuation through the restoration of the remaining occupied lands...."

Corbin